# Life Narrative Co-Construction Analysis Manual[1]

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This tool aims at studying the co-construction of life narratives, seeking to assess the process and the outcome of the dyadic co-construction of life narratives in two domains: (1) the quality of the interaction, including scaffolding processes, and (2) the narrative production, regarding complexity of contents and autobiographical reasoning processes. Some questions it aspires to answer are: (a) what is the quality of the interaction between the child and the adult? (b) how does the adult co-narrator assist the child, facilitating the production of a coherent life narrative? (c) how does the child react to the prompts of the adult co-narrator? (d) how is the adult co-narrator influenced by the child's reactions? This tool was initially formulated for the analysis of data collected with six to twelve-year-old children, through the Life Narrative Interview for Children – LNIC (Henriques, Ribeiro & Saraiva, 2009), a semi-structured life story interview.

This coding and analysis system is primarily based on the coding manuals of Habermas, especially, the manual Interactions in mother-child co-narrations (Habermas & Brenneisen-Mayer, 2009), Biographical Arguments (KOM) & Metacommunicative Statements (META) Manual (Habermas, Paha, Matjasko, Bringewald & Köber, 2012); the Temporal Indicators in Life Narratives (DAT) Manual (Habermas & Kürzer, 2012); the Manual for beginnings and endings of life narratives and initial social contextualization (Habermas, Ehlert-Lerche, Stauffenberg, Rodriguez & Köber, 2012), and the Three Rating Scales for Global Temporal, Causal-Motivational, and Thematic Coherence in Life Narratives (Habermas, Diel, & Peters, 2012). It is also based on the manual of Gonçalves, Henriques, Soares, and Monteiro (2002/2006), the *Sistema de Avaliação da Matriz Narrativa - Diversidade de Conteúdo Narrativo*.

The coding manual is divided into the following six dimensions:

*(1) Mode of Turn-taking;*

*(2) Reaction;*

*(3) Intervention;*

*(4) Scope;*

*(5) Elements*;

*(6) Implicit Valence.*

The dimensions *Mode of Turn-taking, Reaction* and *Intervention* capture phenomena pertaining to the domain of communication and the quality of interaction, while the

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dimensions *Scope*, *Elements* and *Implicit Valence* pertain to the domain of narrative process and production.

The **unit of coding** is each **utterance**, as defined by the change of speaker. As the manual was developed to enable research into the co-construction processes of childrens' and adolescents' life narratives, either between a child/adolescent and a professional interviewer or of child/adolescent and parent/caregiver dyads, speakers have been identified as Child/Adolescent (C), Interviewer (I), Mother (M), Father (F), or Caregiver (CG).

**All utterances** by any speaker (child, parents or caregivers, and interviewers) **are coded**, using all coding dimensions. Coding procedures vary slightly for the different dimensions and are detailed in the respective descriptions, e.g., for some dimensions only one of the categories is coded in each utterance (they are mutually exclusive), for other dimensions each category is coded as present/absent in every utterance.

**Dimension 1.** Mode of turn-taking

Mode of turn-taking refers to the way in which the turn transitions from one speaker to the other. Choose only one category/code. This dimension informs about the way turn-taking is negotiated and whether the interaction plays out in a harmonious way or not.

**Table 1**. Definition and examples for each category in Dimension 1.

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **1.1. Harmonious** | One speaker takes the turn spontaneously, without being asked to, but without interrupting the other speaker. | *"I: did you practice any sport?"* |
| **1.2. Gets the Turn** | The speaker takes the turn after being asked about something or being encouraged to talk. | *Answer to "… what happed then?" or "…please tell me more…"* |
| **1.3. Interrupt** | One speaker interrupts the other. An utterance is considered interrupted if it includes at least a subject, and a verb starts being conjugated but clearly is not completed. If the interrupted utterance is a question or an encouragement the mode of turn-taking is coded as Gets the Turn. Only to be coded when one speaker interrupts the previous speaker's sentence, without completing it. | *"C: Then I went #to…# I: #Could# you talk about school?"* |
| **1.4. Complete** | One speaker finishes the sentence of the previous speaker. This code is only used when the speaker clearly attempts to finish the other speaker's sentence, even if this completion is not in accordance with the other speaker's intention. Complete is also coded if the speaker, to complete the sentence, interrupts the previous speaker. | *"C: In the summer we used to go, to go… I: to the beach?"* |

**Dimension 2.** Reaction

This dimension refers to the way in which a speaker reacts to the preceding utterance of the other speaker. In the case of long utterances, only the beginning of the utterance is considered. For this dimension choose only one category/code. This dimension informs about continuity and ruptures in the interaction between the speakers, and about how each speaker is affected by the interventions of the other speaker.

**Table 2**. Definition and examples for each category in Dimension 2.

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **2.1. Natural Continuity** | The speaker picks up the thread of conversation/narration by continuing in accordance with what the other speaker said or asked. | *"I: Did you practice any sport? C: Yes, I was part of a football club."* |
| **2.2. Reject** | The speaker refuses to explore a theme suggested by the other speaker, attempts to end the exploration, or denies the information previously narrated by the other speaker. The speaker does not modify or correct the narrated information. This category also applies when a speaker does not accept the other speakers wish to end a narrative and insists with further questions. | *"I: Do you want to tell me what happened? C: No, no, no!"* *"C: I don't want to speak about that… I: what exactly happened? Who was there?"* |
| **2.3. Ignore** | The speaker continues her/his former utterance without reacting to the other speaker's intervention. | *"F: No, a little bit of gymnastics, a little bit of this. C: Yes, gymnastics. F: A little bit of that…"* |
| **2.4. Not Remember** | The speaker is not able to recall information or facts mentioned or asked about by the other speaker in the preceding utterance. | *"I: How was your first day of school? C: I can't remember…"* |
| **2.5. Correct** | The speaker corrects information about facts considered wrong, which were narrated by the other speaker in the preceding utterance. | *"C: That was when I was eleven. M: No, you were ten."* |
| **2.6. Confirm** | The speaker validates the information in the previous utterance of the other speaker. Repeating the previous sentence or words from the other speak is considered as a form of validation/ confirmation. Simply answering closed questions with "Yes" is not coded as Confirm. | *"C: Totally yeah"* (would be a typical example). *"C: I then dared to speak… M: To speak".* |
| **2.7. Modification** | The speaker confirms the information or content previously narrated by another speaker but introduces some alterations. This generally has a positive connotation for the interaction. | *"M: Rather a bit shy, formerly yes C: Still, yes…"* (child confirms she is shy but alters the temporality) *"C: yes, but…"* |
| **2.8. Surprise** | The speaker shows amazement by the revelation of significant facts or information | *"M: when he was born, he used to cry a* |

| | that were unknown to him/her, narrated in the previous utterance by the other speaker. | *lot at night. C: really?! I didn´t know that!".* |

## Dimension 3. Intervention

This dimension refers to the communication processes and actions that take place in the interaction between the speakers. For this dimension, judge each category/code as either "present" or "absent". This dimension enables a better understanding regarding which dialogical means promote the narrative production.

**Table 3**. Definition and examples for each category in Dimension 3.

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **3.1. Meta-communication** | Considerations or comments that focus not on the content of the narrative but on the narration process and/or the interactions between the interviewer, the narrator and the co-narrator itself, for example by negotiating how to proceed. | *"C: It's funny, but I can't remember much from that period…"* *"C: No, I don´t want to talk about that… I: Okay then… You only speak about what you want…"* |
| **3.2. Ask for Narrative** | The speaker asks broad questions or invites the other speaker to elaborate on her/his life story. Relatively open questions that relate to a broad life period or a wide element of life. | *"I: So? What do you know about when you were born?"* *"I: Tell me about your time in school…"* |
| **3.3. Orientation** | One speaker prompts another to elaborate on her/his life story, for example by asking several questions that make the narration task more structured, by providing temporal and/or spatial orientations, or by bringing a speaker who has wandered off or is being redundant, back on task. Somewhat intermediately broad questions. | *"I: You could talk about your birthday party, who was there? What did you do?"* *"I: So, you were five years old and it was on your holidays, tell me what happened then…"* *"I: Okay, so you are a big football player!! But now please focus on your first year of school…"* |
| **3.4. Specific Questions** | The speaker asks specific questions to obtain additional information on the topic the narrator is talking about. Questions asked for the clarification of the previous utterance, very closed questions that are aimed at a specific piece of information, as well as affirmational questions ("…right?"). | *"I: Was that aunt a sister of your mother or of your father?"* *"I: Whit whom did you go there?"* |
| **3.5. Give a Clue** | The speaker gives a keyword or idea that functions as a prompt and helps the other speaker to pursue or complete her/his narrative. Only | *"C: I won the "progress" because in the beginning I didn't know English and at the end...ahh… I: ...you* |

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|---|---|---|
| | applies if the other speaker is stuck, looking for the right words to proceed and the speaker gives her/him a hint. | *could catch on... C: Let's say I was more at the level."* |
| **3.6. Encouragement** | One speaker encourages the other speaker, using prompts without specific semantic content, to make him elaborate the narrative. | *"I: Yeah!"*<br>*"I: Hmm, hmm…"* |
| **3.7. Comment** | The speaker makes spontaneous comments about what was previously narrated by the other speaker. | *"I: Wow, that is impressing!"* |
| **3.8. Elaborate** | The speaker adds information on a topic being narrated or begins narrating a new topic, with the purpose of developing the life narrative. | *"C: And we used to go to the cinema every week, all of the group, I really enjoyed that…"* |
| **3.9. Change or End Narrative** | The speaker deliberately changes or ends the exploration of a theme or of the narrative. | *"C: The end!"*<br>*"C: Now I want to talk about my last holydays."* |

**Dimension 4.** Scope

This dimension captures the narrative scope of the utterance in terms of life story vs. single event vs. routine vs. fact. For this dimension, judge each category/code as either "present" or "absent". Scope is coded both for produced/narrated content as well as for targeted/asked-for content in questions and scaffolding efforts of the interviewers or co-narrators. This dimension captures whether the narrative is focused mainly on broader periods of life or on the recall of specific episodes, or whether the person simply presents facts without providing or eliciting a higher-level scope narrative.

**Table 4**. Definition and examples for each category in Dimension 4.

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **4.1. Life Narrative** | Narrative productions that are part of the life story telling exercise, that do not focus on the description of a single occurrence. This includes elaborated reflections on broader life periods. | *"C: My life was a rough path…"*<br>*"C: During school I used to be one of the smallest kids."* |
| **4.2. Single Event** | The speaker narrates a single event, describing a specific occurrence (e.g. episode, experience) in a more or less detailed fashion. The narrative is based on episodic memory evocation processes. | *"C: I remember one time we went to the swimming-pool. I met my cousin and we played football."* |
| **4.3. Routine** | The speaker narrates habits, hobbies, or recurrent events. Habits or hobbies are only coded if there is an explicit reference to the recurrence of events. | *"C: at lunch, I was always served first, so I was the first to finish."* |
| **4.4. Fact** | The speaker just gives a fact, which is not part of a higher-level scope narrative and | *"C: I am very tall for my age."* |

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| without providing or eliciting such a narrative. | |

**Dimension 5.** Narrative Elements and Processes

This dimension refers to the narrative components and processes that constitute the storyline and create temporality, connections between events, meaning, development of the self and others, but not to content in terms of specific themes or topics. For this dimension, judge each category/code as either "present" or "absent". Elements are coded both for produced/narrated content, and for targeted/asked-for content in questions and scaffolding efforts of the interviewers or co-narrators. On the one hand, it concerns the prevalence and diversity of components making up the story, on the other hand it regards the complexity of autobiographical reasoning employed in the storytelling.

**Table 5a.** Definition and examples for each category and subcategory in Dimension 5: Autobiographical Elements

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **5.1. Contextual Content** | | |
| **5.1.1. Event Description** | A narrative sequence constituted by a series of subcomponents that follow a temporal structure, and answers the fundamental question "what happened?". | *"C: and then we all went together to the supermarket (...) and I remember my friend took a calculator and we were doing the math, to see how much we were spending and we made an estimate and later when we went back, we asked him, what is it that you bought now, don't forget to put on the price..."* |
| **5.1.2. Narrative characters** | Narrative characters are all persons, besides the speaker him/herself, mentioned during the storytelling of the life narrative or of a single event. | *"C: my friends and I all went to..."* *"C: one friend of mine that took a calculator..."* *"C: everybody was panicking like crazy before the presentation."* |
| **5.1.3. Settings** | This category refers to physical context where the narrated content takes place, e.g. where the action (or part of the action) happens. If the narrator names the setting, it is enough to determine its existence in the narrative. | *"C: and then we all went together to the supermarket..."* *"C: first, they were there, then paraded, they had to go down the stairways to the room already dressed, they always obtained a lot of clean clothes, we clapped hands..."* |
| **5.1.4. Circumstances** | This category refers to elements related to circumstances that help to contextualize the narrated event. This includes temporal, motivational or character/person-related depictions/narration, which | *"C: On my first day of school it was raining a lot."* |

| | are not adequately captured by more specific categories. | |
|---|---|---|
| **5.2. Emotional and Evaluative Content** | | |
| **5.2.1. Emotions** | The speaker talks openly about her/his feelings or uses expressions that reflect feelings or emotional states. Emotions includes not only emotion words but all kind of expressions that clearly suggest emotional states and feelings, which could also be metaphors or framed as Evaluations (e.g. "I feel down"; "It was horrible, very, very bad"). Note: Evaluations and Emotions can be expressed at the same time. | *"C: when I found out that my best friend was not coming, I was sad."* *"C: everybody was panicking like crazy before the presentation and I'm like: yes… no big deal."* *"C: and still today it is quite hard for us to talk about this..."* |
| **5.2.2. Evaluations** | The speaker uses internal state language to express his/her point of view on the narrated content. The expression needs to contain modes of thinking and judging. Note: Evaluations and Emotions can be expressed at the same time. | *"C: I had to move to another city, and I didn't like that."* *"C: I had to leave my friends behind and that was a pity…"* *"C: but she is quite a complicated person."* |
| **5.2.3. Metaphors about specific events** | This category includes comments where the narrator uses metaphors to express an idea about a specific event or contend. | *"C: there is astronomy and astrology... two separate things. Astrology looks at one side and science look at another side. Those sides are not arguing... it's just ... imagine... there's a doughnut half chocolate, half normal and imagine, one person is eating the chocolate and another person is eating the normal... They're different things... they're different subjects, two different ways of seeing the same things."* |
| **5.2.4. Temporal comparisons** | This category contains comparisons between different periods of time which could be past/present, two different periods in the past, past/future, present/future, or future/future, as long as they are temporally ordered. Note that comparisons between people or other aspects are not coded if they are not temporally ordered (e.g. "I'm not | *"C: a lot is still like it used to be back then…"* (similarity past-present) *"C: we were best friends but nowadays we don't speak with each other anymore."* (contrast past-present) |

| | | like my sister" would not be coded). |
|---|---|---|
| **5.2.5. Re-appraisals** | This category includes comments that re-evaluate an event, positive instead of negative or vice versa, as the narrator has learned some additional knowledge or gained some new insight. | *"C: I now understand why we had to move away from Oporto when I was a child and don't blame my parents anymore." (positive re-appraisal)* <br> *"C: at the time I was really happy to leave my parents' home. But looking back I realize that I lost my family and the basic security it provides, no matter how difficult they are." (negative re-appraisal)* |
| **5.2.6. Future/Desire** | This category includes comments about plans, expectations, desires, wishes for the future. | *"C: I think I will have children one day."* |
| **5.2.7. Potentially traumatic circumstances** | The speaker narrates events or details which are, in the view of the coder, potentially overwhelming and/or traumatic. | *"C: my father would start drinking and all that and then he would get home kind of…there, ahh, he started to break things there at home."* <br> *"C: yes, showed an unappropriated behavior, yes, kind of touched her and she was offended, touched her breast…"* |
| **5.3. Characterization of self** | | |
| **5.3.1. Description of self** | The speaker narrates personality characteristics or values without linking them to any autobiographical reasoning processes. Only explicit personality characteristics are coded, hobbies and interests are not coded. | *"M: Emma was a Mommie's child, just a little bit…"* <br> *"F: you are not really a Fiesta Lady, you actually are a kind of shy person."* <br> *"C: everyone says I am very funny."* |
| **5.3.2. Changes of self without reasons** | The speaker narrates changes of personality or values without knowing or referring the reasons for change in terms of autobiographical reasoning processes. | *"M: you also have been a little shy and in Primary School, I think, this has somehow changed, but how I exactly I actually don't know."* |

**Table 5b.** Definition and examples for each category and subcategory in Group 5: Autobiographical reasoning

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **5.4. Temporal orientation** | | |
| **5.4.1. Dating an event or life period** | Dating events in life using age, date, or life phase. The dating | *"C: that was when I was a small child."* <br> *"C: In third grade"* |

| | makes it possible to locate the event in the life path. Just providing an order (e.g. "later") is not enough. | *"F: that was in March 1987."* *"M: and then, in 2007, you got into school."* |
|---|---|---|
| **5.4.2. Temporal sequencing of different events or life periods** | The speaker narrates different events or other narrative elements, structuring them by their temporal order and displaying the ability to create temporality. The links between the narrated elements must clearly show an understanding of the underlying temporal structure. | *"C: we lived in Kassel; F: And then you came." (here the narrator establishes a clear temporal sequence of different narrative elements)* *"C: first I was in primary school in Oporto, then I changed to Gaia for secondary school, and now I have returned to Oporto to go to college."* |

| **5.5. Causal-motivational autobiographical reasoning** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **5.5.1. Biographical antecedents and consequences** | After narrating an event or life period, the speaker adds biographical antecedents and/or consequences which she/he explicitly relates to that event or period as causally or motivationally linked. | *"C: because my mother moved to France, I could see my father only once a year."* |
| **5.5.2. Biographical justification of strange behavior or experience** | A person's behavior or experience is explained with the help of (unique or repeated) earlier experiences and circumstances in that person's life story, experiences and circumstances that have created a special sensitivity towards certain situations or lent them a significance. Such experiences/reactions explained through past experiences are frequently in some way extraordinary, deviant, still in need of clarification or astonishing. | *"C: when my father caught me with marijuana, he reacted drastically, not talking to me any more for 8 weeks. Mind you, that was because his best friend had died of heroin."* |
| **5.5.3. Formative influence** | Linking characteristics of a life period to the formation of the speaker's personality or values. | *"C: I used to visit my grandmother once a week. She told me some stories about how things used to be during the Nazi regime, this made a deep impression on me, and I am still hold strong anti-fascist convictions."* *"F: yes, well, that grandma story really left an impression on you."* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **5.5.4. Learning a lesson** | Lesson learning refers to learning a specific lesson from an event that could direct future behavior in similar situations. Lessons are fairly concrete. | *"C: that time I had a really bad grade, and I lied to my mother. I really got into trouble and never did that again."* |
| **5.5.5. Event changes personality or values** | A change in personality or values is related to a specific event. | *"C: ever since my parents split up, I have become a shy person."* |
| **5.5.6. Event offers insight into one's personality or values** | An insight into oneself or one's values is revealed by an event. | *"C: when I split from my girlfriend, I fell into a deep hole. It made me realize how much I depend on others."* |
| **5.6. Thematic autobiographical reasoning** | | |
| **5.6.1. Personality or values explains action** | Description of events or actions that are a typical example of or are explained by the personality or values of the speaker. | *"F: he was such a hot head, he just hit him."* |
| **5.6.2. Action is atypical for personality** | Negating that an action can be explained by a trait, personality or values of the speaker, by stating that an action is atypical for the self, thereby safeguarding self-stability against events that disrupt stability. | *"C: when I fell, I cried. Usually I am really brave."* |
| **5.6.3. Metaphors for self or life** | Describing typical patterns of actions/experiences of the self or one's entire life at a general abstract level with a metaphor. | *"C: my life is like a roller coaster, up and down…"* |
| **5.6.4. Generalizing** | Universally valid insights into and realizations about how "the world" or "life" generally function. The generalization needs to be inferred from a specific experience. Such reflections may also be relatively trivial, they should, however, show that the narrator understands them as general statements about life. Generalizations must not refer to a single object/experience/person but at least to a group of them. In comparison to Learning a Lesson this category is more comprehensive. Do not code figures of speech employed in a stereotyped manner, without any recognizable reference about content. | *"C: I missed him for many months. It's probably always like that, when it's the first kiss."* |

**Dimension 6.** Implicit Valence

This dimension refers to the subjective appreciations of the narrated content. Explicit remarks of the speaker/narrator are considered, although, the final coding is based on the coder's general impression. For this dimension choose one category/code only. Implicit Valence is coded both for produced/narrated content, and for targeted/asked-for content in questions and scaffolding efforts of the interviewers or co-narrators. This dimension informs about the emotional and/or evaluative valence of the narrated contents, as explicitly stated by the speaker/narrator or expectable from general social conventions.

**Table 6**. Definition and examples for each category in Dimension 6: Implicit Valence

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **6.1. Neutral** | The personal appreciation is neutral and no intelligible appreciation is expressed, such as simply narrating facts. E.g. own birth; adolescence; school (when no valence is alluded to). | *"I: about your birth, what do you know? C: I know I was born in Oporto."* |
| **6.2. Positive** | A positive appreciation about the current topic is openly expressed or intelligible to the coder. E.g. play; holidays; traveling; personal progress; relationships; romantic partners; meeting new people (if no other valence is intelligibly attributed). | *"C: In primary school I had many friends."* *"C: we went for holidays to Brazil."* |
| **6.3. Negative** | A negative appreciation about the current topic is openly expressed or intelligible to the coder. E.g. death of family members; threatening situations; social rejection (if no other valence is intelligibly attributed). | *"C: my father went to work in Angola, and only visited us once a year."* *"C: my grandmother died last year in September."* |
| **6.4. Ambivalent** | The speaker experiences "mixed feelings" about the narrated content, which are expressed openly or intelligible to the coder. E.g. changes in general; divorce (if no other valence is intelligibly attributed). | *"C: we moved to a bigger house, but now I live farer away from my best friend."* |
| **6.5. Change Positive-Negative/Neutral** | A positively appreciated narrative contend develops in such a way that the appreciation shifts to a neutral or negative one at the end. This shift is openly expressed or intelligible to the coder. E.g. relationships that end up in a fight. | *"C: I moved to intermediate school and initially everything was going well, but in 6th grade some kids started bullying me."* |
| **6.6. Change Negative-Positive/Neutral** | A negatively appreciated narrative contend develops in such a way that the appreciation shifts to a neutral or | *"C: I didn't like to go there on holydays, but my grandmother lived* |

| | positive one at the end, this shift is openly expressed or intelligible to the coder. E.g. an accident which turned out well; the need for private tuition which leads to success. | *close by and I got to spend a lot of time with her, that was nice…"* |
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Regarding the use of this manual (or of some of its dimensions), a thorough training of coders, using transcripts of actual life story telling exercises and including repeated verifications of intercoder agreements, is recommended. Detailed training recommendations and further coding guidelines may be obtained from the authors.